



Democratic Environmental Caucus of Florida (DECF) June 21th, 2021

Candidate Lists and Biographies

Updated 7-21-2021, 1:00 am

CANDIDATES FOR DECF PRESIDENT

(Names in alphabetical order)

Candidate List (as of 7-21-2021, 1:00 am)

Candidate Name: Russell Conn

Candidate Name: Steven Meza

BIOGRAPHIES FOR CANDIDATES FOR DECF PRESIDENT



Biography 1: Russell Conn:

I moved to Hillsborough in 2016 from South Florida and founded the Hillsborough Chapter of the DECF in 2019. During my tenure, I grew the chapter to become one of the largest and most effective Caucuses in Hillsborough County with over 60 dues paying members. Together we built a streamlined organization and have been effective advocates for responsible climate solutions locally, by working with elected's, candidates and the Democratic party.

During the past two years the chapter organized a town hall with 3 county commissioners, a regional fundraiser, a national speaker, achieved a high percentage of endorsed candidates who won their races, and facilitated donations of over four thousand dollars for candidates. We also sourced eco friendly merchandise, participated in cleanups, trolled climate denying Ross Spano and provided critical input to help shape policy at both the local level, and state of Florida; by participating in lobby days and cultivating relationships with leaders in the climate fight.

I am an energetic leader both as an environmental advocate and as an organizer. I currently serve as the Vice Chair of Outreach under the leadership of Chair Lone Townsend with the Hillsborough Democratic Party and have been an important contributor to the DEC's successes. I have served on the Victory Fund Committee, formed new clubs and caucuses (Tampa Bay Labor Caucus and North Tampa Club), am a primary support for clubs and caucuses, and interface with leaders across the state to guide and facilitate best practices that led to electoral success. I am uniquely suited to lead the DECF with a vision to build up a GOTV and registration campaign that is targeted and effective in 2022.

I have already proven I have the work ethic, time and teamwork skills to lead and transform the DECF into a more effective organization. As your next President, I will ensure the caucus is more welcoming, inclusive, and transparent by building on the work of the outgoing administration. We will make it a priority to work together with the board and membership to encourage the needed participation from front line communities and our disabled

Floridians, who are the most impacted from climate disasters. There is a lot of work to do and with your support we can make it happen!

Due to my personal situation I am in a unique position to be able to do this work as a full time job. I am experienced enough to be effective on day one, thoughtful enough to make efficient use of limited volunteer time, focused on advocating for others, and technologically skilled enough to streamline our operations and outreach efforts.

Why I do this: My father had terminal Cancer and passed away in 2018. After taking care of him for 5 years I wanted to devote my substantial free time to doing something that matters. After analyzing the current political climate, I decided getting Democrats elected and getting (keeping) Trump out of office is the best way we can preserve the future. My work experience includes management of both people and projects, asset development, wholesale business to business, and sales.

Find out more about my Candidacy at <https://www.russ4decf.org/>

and endorse our Campaign here <https://forms.gle/GGh2rysBUufGJRh1A>



Biography 2: Steven Meza:

My name is Steven Meza, I am 22 years old and a first generation Jamaican Peruvian American seeking your vote to be the next DECF Chair. I am an environmental activist previously holding positions as the Florida College Democrats environmental caucus chair and currently co-chair of the DECF PAC Committee. Additionally I previously ran as the youngest candidate for Florida state senate, district 33. I advocated for many democratic values but most importantly the protection, preservation, and sustainability of our state's unique environment.

Why am I running; with my previous experience as a candidate I hope to share my knowledge to build upon the foundation we have to increase voter education and outreach, candidate recruitment, and training on environmental issues. As well as modernize our website and bolster our social media presence with tools every chapter can access. Finally I hope to grow the environmental caucus with chapters in every county and create political capital through the use of a state PAC, continue building our relationship with state and federally elected officials, and most importantly of all diversify our membership and initiatives that leave a lasting impact not only within our caucus but throughout the state.

Together we can move our caucus and our state forward as we strive to become one of the most powerful caucuses not only within the FDP, but within the state, as a team united on the mission to preserve and protect our Florida and democracy.

CANDIDATES FOR DECF VICE PRESIDENT

(Names in alphabetical order)

Candidate List

Candidate Name: Cay Burton

Candidate Name: Janelle Christensen

BIOGRAPHIES FOR CANDIDATES FOR DECF VICE PRESIDENT



Biography 1: Cay Burton:

Cay Burton for DECF V.P. 2021

My name is Cay Burton, and I am asking for your vote for Vice President of the DECF. Having grown up in a military family and moving frequently to new places with a variety of cultures, I learned early that it is important to build a network of friends and associates in the community. In high school, I started a successful volunteer program at a local hospital. Experience has led me to believe that change worth making is accomplished through open minded teamwork and collaboration. At this time, there is no change more urgent than that required to address the way society is treating our environment, wildlife and people, as commodities to be used up, instead of precious gifts to be protected.

As a member of DECF for 5 years and having previous experience in union activism, I helped organize a team of scientifically and environmentally minded volunteers and led them in the creation of a DECF Chapter in Okaloosa County (OC-DECF). With our participation, Okaloosa County Democrats had the largest percentage increase in Democratic voter turnout in Florida in 2020, compared to 2016. I organized a field trip for members to visit our recycling facility. We

helped move the County to save its recycling program in 2018 and pushed for a new Citizen Board for its' improvement. Two members of our chapter serve on this board. We are working closely with a neighborhood coalition that is shining a light on injustices in a minority neighborhood, which has suffered from prior industrial chemical dumping and storm water flooding. We have donated native trees and shrubs, planted and nurtured them to assist in shoreline restoration after Hurricane Sally. I have organized tables at events like Earth Day and Electric Car Shows. I believe that I can contribute to making our DECF organization even more successful and efficient.

Education:

- M.S., Employment & Labor Relations, University of Illinois, ('93)
- B.A., Political Science, University of Illinois ('87)

Career:

- Distribution One ('04-'10 & '12-'16) (NJ, FL) Software Trainer and Analyst
- C.A.E.L. (Council on Adult Education & Learning) ('01-'04) (NJ) Benefits & Education Consultant · NJ City Councilwoman ('00-04) Achieved grant to add bicycle path through town and book exchange in Borough Hall; raised awareness of renewable energy sources
- Labor Union Organizer & Rep: AFGE ('95-'96) (NJ), SEIU Hospital Workers ('90-'91) (MA, NY). APWU ('78-'82) (VA) & Central Labor Council ('82) (VA)

Democratic Volunteer:

- Board Member, OC-DECF ('20-currently) (FL)
- Chapter Chair , OC-DECF ('18-'20) (FL)
- Vice Chair, Okaloosa County Democratic Executive Committee ('14-'16) (FL) · Secretary, Okaloosa County Democratic Executive Committee ('13) (FL)
- Democratic Activist, ('78- currently) (IL, MA, NY, NJ, VA, FL)
- Legislative Liaison, APWU ('77-81) (VA)



Biography 2: Janelle Christensen:

My name is Janelle Christensen and I am running for Vice President of the Democratic Environmental Caucus of Florida (DECF). My research is on hurricane preparedness for vulnerable populations in Florida. I have translated my research background into action, first, by managing a State House campaign in 2018 and as President of DECF since 2019. During this time we (with the Board) have expanded our political influence by more actively supporting environmental candidates, improving upon our environmental advocacy in Tallahassee and expanding our National reach through the Democratic Environmental Network (a collaboration between other state Environmental caucuses). As part of my commitment to Environmental Justice, I am stepping back from my role as President and supporting Steven Meza as President and Sonja Brookins as Secretary in their efforts to expand their roles in DECF leadership.

To learn more about my research, you can find my CV here: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Agn5a66SqlOPZvMXzU__VI1Pz551pTkOsQ5suLmD7TGE/edit?usp=sharing

CANDIDATES FOR DECF SECRETARY

(Names in alphabetical order)

Candidate List



Candidate Name: Dr. Sonja Brookins

BIOGRAPHIES FOR CANDIDATES FOR DECF SECRETARY

Biography 1: Dr. Sonja Brookins:

My name is Dr. Sonja Brookins, and I am running for Secretary of the Democratic Environmental Caucus of Florida (DECF). My role as an elected official has allowed me to use my platform with an emphasis on Environmental Justice. I have made it clear that diversity is lacking in environmental issues and that representation on committees/caucuses is one road to environmental equity. I have made an impact on being a part of the solution by committing myself to various boards and committees that would create an avenue for change as an environmental presence for all. I have collaborated with each board member on addressing the impact on environmental health as well as toxic elements that flood our ecosystem. I am currently the Chair of the Standup Environmental Justice to bring awareness to issues that affect everyday lives. I want to expand my leadership role on being your next Secretary for the DECF to effectuate a holistic and more diversified narrative.

Boards

Hillsborough County Soil and Water Conservation, Treasurer

Black Caucus of Hillsborough County, Board of Directors, Treasurer

Palm Beach County Environmental Caucus, Charter member, Board of Directors

Hillsborough County Environmental Caucus, Board of Directors Environmental Caucus of Florida, Chair of Standup Environmental Justice

Coastal Working Group (National Association of Conservation Districts), Florida,

nominated Florida Farm Bureau member LEADS,
Board of Directors (Pinellas County) Community
Advisory Board (Pinellas County)
Healthcare Advisory Board (Hillsborough County)

CANDIDATES FOR DECF TREASURER

(Names in alphabetical order)

Candidate List

Candidate Name: Karen Michalski

Candidate Name: Leanna Pearce

BIOGRAPHIES FOR CANDIDATES FOR DECF TREASURER



Biography 1: Karen Michalski:

For the last 3 years, I've been Sierra Club Tampa Bay Treasurer. My responsibilities included

- balancing 4 bank accounts including a National Sierra Club account.
- complete annual reporting to ensure C4 and C3 spending and donations are separated.
- track all transactions to ensure either budget or motion approved.

Currently I'm the Hillsborough County Chair and plan to incorporate this financial accounting into

our chapter.

My day job, as a Supporting Chemist, requires a similar skill set since all components must be counted when determining contamination concentration or purity.



Biography 2: Leanna Pearce:

Hello my name is Leanna Pearce and I am asking for your vote to serve as Treasurer of the Democratic Environmental Caucus of Florida.

I bring 25 years of professional tax and accounting experience through my small business in Jacksonville Florida. My clients have ranged from individuals, candidates, corporations(all), partnerships and caucuses. Highlighted services include compliance, tax preparation and bookkeeping.

(Leanna Pearce | LinkedIn)

As Treasurer I will provide a fact-based budget, an automated accounting system and real time “budget vs actual” reporting. As the Finance chair I will set fundraising goals, apply for voter registration grants, and invest in other opportunities to expand our candidate toolbox and chapter resources.

In addition to my accounting practice. I have worked as a field organizer for the Florida Democratic Party in the 2016 and 2018 election cycles and for Bloomberg in 2020. I will apply this field experience to the treasurer’s position to help create an environment that works together to get the job done.

CANDIDATES FOR DECF SCIENCE OFFICER

(Names in alphabetical order)

Candidate List

Candidate Name: Jeffery Van Treese, PhD, JD

Candidate Name: Roy "David" Walker

Candidate Name: Richard Whitman

BIOGRAPHIES FOR CANDIDATES FOR DECF SCIENCE OFFICER



Biography 1: Jeffery Van Treese, PhD, JD

Dr. Jeff Van Treese is an attorney and ecologist, holding a Ph.D. in Ecology (Concentration: Soil and Water Science). He teaches environmental science and Business Law coursework at Palm Beach State College and is also the Pre-Law Magnet teacher at Palm Beach Lakes High School. Jeff serves as the DECF Communications Chair and has hosted our Facebook Livestream for the past year (www.facebook.com/democraticenvironmentalcaucusofflorida/videos) in which he interviewed 33 environmental leaders to discuss how we can tackle Florida's current and future ecological challenges. Jeff is a passionate advocate for the environment. His leadership, scientific, educational, legal, and communications skills make him well suited to serve as DECF Science Officer.

EDUCATION

University of Florida, Doctor of Philosophy (Ecology-Soil and Water Science), 2017

University of Florida, Master of Science (Soil and Water Science), 2010

Florida International University, Juris Doctor (Law), 2010

Florida Atlantic University, Bachelor of Arts (Economics and Environmental Studies), 2007

SELECTED PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATION

Van Treese, J., Koeser, A., Olexa, M., Fitzpatrick, G. and Allen, A. Frequency and Relative Severity of Tree Crashes in Florida, 2006-2013. *Arboriculture and Urban Forestry*. 45(2):65-74 (2019).

Van Treese, J., Koeser, A., Olexa, M., Fitzpatrick, G. and Allen, A., A review of the impact of roadway vegetation on drivers' health and well-being and the risks associated with single-vehicle crashes. *Arboricultural Journal* 39:3 (2017).

Van Treese, J. and Olexa, M., Application of Florida-Friendly Landscaping Statute to Homeowner Disputes Regarding Violation of Restrictive Covenants. *Florida Bar Journal*. (November/December 2020)

Van Treese, J., Hanlon, E., Amponsah, N., Izursa, J., Capece, J., A. Energy Valuation Methods for Biofuels in South Florida: Introduction to Life Cycle Assessment and Energy Approaches.

University of Florida, IFAS Extension Publication # SL377 (2013)



Biography 2 : Roy "David" Walker:

I'm Roy "David" Walker, running for the Science Officer position with the Democratic Environmental Caucus of Florida. As a passionate, self-driven, and motivated environmental professional with substantial experiences in environmental resource management, scientific field research, and environmental education, in addition to my educational background rooted in sustainable development and land use management. I am looking to apply my passion for conservation and commitment to create and maintain environmental stewardship, long-term sustainability, and community resilience.

My education from American Public University includes a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Science / Fish and Wildlife Management and a certificate in Public Land Management. A Master of Science degree in Environmental Policy and Management with a concentration in Environmental Planning and a Graduate Certificate in Environmental Sustainability.

In addition to my academic background, my environmental field experiences include a Senior Environmental Reviewer at Environmental Review, Inc., Urban Conservation Director with South Florida Audubon Society, Biological Scientist with Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission, Researcher at United States Geological Survey.

In 2015, I received President Obama's Volunteer Service Award to dedicate my extracurricular services to our community, including environmental programs like restoring native beach dune habitat and stewardship in protecting our natural resources and wildlife.

I am looking forward to serving as the next Science Officer with the Democratic Environmental Caucus of Florida to use my skills for developing scientific and technical positions to preserve and protect Florida's natural resources.



Biography 3 : Richard Whitman:

Richard Whitman, Ph.D. : Candidate for Science Officer DECF

If given the opportunity to serve as your DECF state Science Officer I will strive to consolidate, promote and prioritize state wide scientifically sound environmental issues that are consistent with the principals of the Democratic Party. I will work with chapters to develop and coordinate evidence based educational information for members, targeted public, candidates and officials. I will coordinate and facilitate among chapters on initiatives, consensus positions and statements. I will promote environmental policies based on quality science and values.

Background:

Dr. Whitman is currently Vice President of Charlotte County DECF and its acting Science Officer. He is an internationally recognized expert on beach and shoreline ecology. He has produced over 200 peer reviewed journal articles and technical reports being cited in over 6200 journals and many national/international media outlet. His contributions include descriptions of novel species, new invasives, pioneering work water-borne disease indicators, modeling paradigms for water quality prediction, and books on water quality monitoring and pathogen indicators.

Dr. Whitman received a Ph.D. from Texas A&M University 1979 focused on aquatic ecology and toxicology. He worked on spacecraft sanitation (NASA), taught ecology at Indiana University-NW for 10 years. He then joined the National Park Service as Chief Scientist for Indiana Dunes National Park. He became a Station Chief for the United States Geological Survey leading a research team of about 20 ecologists and clerical staff in 1993. He has served on a number of national, international advisory environmental committees, and was a principal on numerous national initiatives.

Other Notable Work Assignments

Detail, Director of Natural Resources, NPS

Detail, Director, Water Resource Division, NPS

Detail, Assistant, Regional Director, National Biological Survey

Assistant Superintendent (acting), Indiana Dunes National Park

Division Chief (acting), Coastal and Wetland Ecology, USGS

Adjunct Appointments: Michigan State, Indiana, Purdue, Valparaiso Universities.

Significant Articles

<https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=HzSkEyIAAAAJ&hl=en>

CANDIDATES FOR DECF CHAPTER DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

(Names in alphabetical order)

Candidate List

Candidate Name: Tiffany Furr Grantham

Candidate Name: Barbara Klein

BIOGRAPHIES FOR CANDIDATES FOR DECF CHAPTER DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

Biography 1: Tiffany Furr Grantham

I attended UNC at Greensboro, UM and FAU majoring in fine art. My first career was 25 years in the Editorial Art Department at The Miami Herald. My second career is 30 years in my own business of housing and rentals. Along the way I loved working with my brother's election campaigns, and last but not least Mom with two grown wonderful sons. My new life is as an activist with the Broward Climate Alliance, Democratic Environmental Caucus, Sierra Club, LWV, and The Right to Clean Water (please go to FL5.org and sign, date and mail). I would love to spread the word all over our state and get more folks involved, knowledgeable and voting for endorsed environmental candidates. Let's get an environmental caucus in every county.



Biography 2: Barbara Klein:

In November of 2016, Barbara Klein was elected as the first chair of the Environmental Caucus of Sarasota County Democrats or ECSCD. She has very ably built a vibrant organization and will remain on the ECSCD Board of Directors as an advisor. ECSCD accomplishments qualify Barbara to build successful chapters. With policies in place and new DECF By-laws and a new Chapter Template in the works Barbara intends to develop a statewide Committee to double the number of Chapters.